

**Some Wonderful Christmas Memories  
of Mom and Dad  
By Rhea Wanlass Lewis (2002)**

As I was laying in bed thinking about the Christmas season of my youth, it was many years ago but seems like just last year when the Wanlass family was looking forward to santa coming soon and all the hustle and getting things decorated and ready for the BIG day to finally arrive.

We lived at 442 North Center Street in Lehi, Utah- Mother(Alta) and Dad and us four children, Rhea, Stanley, Kathryn and Lois. For the most part, we were a happy family and usually got along very well with each other. We had fun playing together or with our neighborhood friends. Mother always made sure we invited the less popular kids to our parties and playtimes. Mother was a person that cared about people and put herself out to be kind and giving to everyone she knew. She was a very generous person.

I guess the first Christmas I remember was when I was three years old, mostly because Mother told me about it nearly every year. I had scarlet fever and had to stay in my bedroom away from the other people. I had a little iron bed and remember looking out of the window when sitting up on the bed. Mother put a small Christmas tree in my room that year with shiny ornaments on the branches. Mother had told me many times how I climbed out of bed to ring a gold bell on the tree and tipped it over and broke many of the ornaments. I believe this was the first year we lived in that home.

I don't recall the seasons much until there were three and four children in our family. I do remember the feeling I had for three or four weeks before Christmas finally came. I was so excited and kept an eye on the windows every night, because Mother continually told us children that Santa could see us and knew what we were doing. I really tried to be good most of the time. I still think he is watching me...it's a feeling I get at this time of year even in my old age.

When we were small, the kitchen and dining room had a swinging door between them. Mother would be in the dining room sewing on grandma Wanlass' old treadle sewing machine. She would make our new pajamas or night gowns every year and would give them to us on Christmas eve so we'd look nice on Christmas morning. I got stuck in the little kitchen tending the smaller kids. Sometimes I would try to peek through the crack around the door to see the color of material she was sewing on.

Dad wouldn't get home until after 8:00 when the service station was closed. He was so tired and cold when he got home with the old greasy money bag containing the day's earnings. He would hide the bag in a closet or drawer in the bathroom until morning and then take it back to the station. When he came home each night, he would sit in his chair in the living room and us kids would unlace his shoes and get his slipper on for him. I remember him washing his hands after he got home before supper and how the grease was in every pore and wondered if his hands would ever come clean. (They finally did after he was retired several years).

One week before Christmas, our family would go find a REAL tree to decorate in our living room corner. It was always cold weather and we just wanted the finest tree but mother needed to pick the best one...for some reason they were never perfect. Dad usually had to tie the tree with a rope or wire it to the curtain rod or get it to stand straight or bore a hole in the trunk to put an extra limb where was missing.

Mother kept the decorations in large dress boxes in the high-up cupboard in the kitchen. One box contained ornaments, the other held the large lights. She would decorate the tree and then let us add our construction paper stars or chains from school. The icicles took the most time and she had to have them all hanging straight and thick. Under the tree, mother placed 3 or 4 little cardboard houses and santa in his little sleigh with reindeer. A couple of icicles were used as reins to guide the sleigh through the cotton snow.

We loved the tree and would sit by the fireplace each night and look at it and the gifts under it, wondering what each contained. There was one each year for each of us children from Mrs. Crabb wrapped in tissue paper. This gift usually was something she had crocheted. There were gifts from our friends and a tube of toothpaste from grandma Wanlass.

Christmas Eve would finally arrive and after we went to bed, (Stan and I were in the scary basement), we would start calling up the steps to mother and dad. "Is it time to get up yet?" I'm sure they had just gone to bed, but we couldn't sleep and it seemed to us that many hours had passed and it surely was time to get up to see what Santa had brought to us.

There was an unwritten rule in our home that no one could peek before everyone had gone to the bathroom (which there was only one), brushed our teeth, combed our hair, and everyone was ready except dad and mother who wanted to sleep.

Dad would go in first and start a fire in the fireplace and mother would turn a light on. We finally got to go in and see what our long brown socks which we had pinned together and hung over the back of a chair contained. There were always lumpy and we knew there was an orange, banana and nuts in the bottom. We were more excited about what was in the top of the stocking. Usually it was a neat surprise like a watch or necklace.

The girls always got a new doll each year. Some of the dolls I received were a Margaret O'Brian, large baby doll, storybook dolls, (which Stan threw down the steps and broke later on) and a sparkle plenty doll. Mother usually made us girls a new dress and we got a few other simple things like games etc.

Stan got Lincoln logs, train, cars and Sunday clothes also. Mother and Dad didn't get many gifts that I remember. During the war, Dad would get us all a war bond which was put on the branch of the tree. He was more practical and didn't believe in so many gifts as mother. Neither of them had many things as a child, but

mother wanted to make up for it in giving to others. Dad wanted to save his money for the future, that was the difference between them. We always had what we needed and wanted though.

After we had opened our gifts and emptied our socks of their surprises, we would spend the morning, going to the neighbors and friends homes to see what they got under their trees and they would come to see our 'stuff' also. We would maybe play a game or two with them before mother would feed us a big dinner, usually turkey or ham.

In the afternoon, we would travel to grandmas in Provo as we called her, to see what she had and give her a gift from us which was usually something pretty from mother and some money. Grandpa was his usual fun self, always so happy and he would sing and play the guitar for us while grandma would feed us some fruit cake or candy. They never had enough money to buy us grandchildren much of anything. They had ten children and sixty something grandchildren, but she would manage to find us a little hanky or some love. On our way home we often stopped at Uncle Grants and Aunt June's home in Orem to see them and what they got.

Mother was always upset that they had their gifts and things put away already and we never did get to see what they got. It was different from our house, the living room looked like it was ready to move for several days after Christmas so we could play with our things and have them where any neighbors and friends that dropped by could see them. The long brown stockings we hung up on Christmas eve were the very ones I wore to school each day in the winter with a garter belt to hold them up. I wish I could find some like them today to hang up. They held a lot of loot.

One year after mother had most of her shopping done, someone stole the presents from under her nose while she was paying at a store counter. She had to backtrack and buy more things for us and she didn't have enough money left, so we didn't get all she had planned that year. I received a pen one year that I still

have and the bottle of ink for it. It was the latest thing on the market of its kind. That was before ballpoint pens. I used it in high school for my homework and shorthand lessons.

When I was in 7th grade...1950, my brother Dallan came from Idaho where he lived with his father to be with us at Christmas. He drove an old ford car down alone. He was 17 years old and I remember him coming. We were all so happy to see him and have him with us. We went to church and mother had bought him some gifts and also some for his friend who didn't end up coming with him, so I guess Dallan got his also. He brought me a box camera and a pink sweater which I still have. Santa brought me a record player/radio that year. I was second hand bout at Laneys store, but I didn't realize it was a hand-me-down and I love to sit in the dining room at night and listen to the popular music by the hour and sing along with the words. I knew all the words to all the songs.

A couple of days after Christmas, Dallan had to return to Idaho. I remember all of us standing out in front of the house and watching him drive up past the park in the snow. I was thinking I don't think I'll ever see him again, and I didn't. The next night he and his friend and his girlfriend were going to a dance at the Y-dell in Burley Idaho when their car, driven by his friend, was hit by a train. Dallan was thrown out of the car and died of a broken neck.

Our family had to drive to Burley in the worst snowstorm for the funeral. Dad had to un-roll the window and put his head out to see the side of the road to see where to go. We had to stop at a little town on the Idaho border and stall all night. It was impossible to go further that night.

The funeral was the day before New Years, 1951. That has been over 50 years now, which seems impossible. I'm sure mother is happy to be with Dallan now and also our little sister Joyce who died shortly after being born in Oakley, Idaho.

There have been many Christmas presents and stories since this time. We

have always been happy and enjoyed the season, but these events always put a little sadness into the joy. Mother never did get over it and went to work after that to try and forget the sad times at Christmas and help others celebrate and get prepared with buying gifts from her at Devey's store. She gift-wrapped the clothes so pretty and made sure all of us received a new outfit each year. Even after the grand-kids arrived she made sure they got something fun also. I got married just before Christmas in 1958 so I'm sure that made it a little harder to make the money go around for the wedding and gifts also.

Now since I've been married 44 years, I am looking back and remembering the years my children were small and how much fun it was to shop for their toys and clothes. I remember one year when we had three small children. Lynette, Lorraine and Gregory, after they were to bed on Christmas eve, I looked under the tree after Santa had been there and added in my head that I had spent nearly \$300. I thought how extravagant I had been. Now I wish that was all I needed to spend each year.

We now have eleven and our five children with their wives and husbands and its never been better. We love each of them so much and wish them all the best now and in the years to come. Holly has been married this year and son she and Roger will be the first to start the new family of great-grandchildren. So it goes year after year and when Gary and I are gone they will still have family parties and continue the traditions which our parents started and those we have formed as the years go by and they will start new ones of their own. I wish you all a merry Christmas and the best of things yet to come. Always remember the true meaning of Christmas and the birthday of Jesus which we celebrate this and every years Love, Rhea.